EDITHA.

A

TRAGEDY.

By HUGH DOWNMAN, M. D.

EXETER:

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M,DCC,LXXXIV.

Price ONE SHILLING and SIXPENCE.

TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

EXETER

AND ITS

NEIGHBOURHOOD,

THIS TRAGEDY

IS INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

PROLOGUE.

WHEREE'ER Mankind to ſacred freedom juſt,
Have ſoar'd above the groveling Sons of duſt;
Wheree'er the Arts their fragrant wreathes have wove;
Wheree'er the virtues leagued with Patriot love,
And bright-eyed Science ſhed her heavenly dews;
There public taſte hath nurſed the Tragic Muſe.
And Reaſon to her generous care conſign'd,
The nobleſt, beſt emotions of the mind.
'Tis her's where human inſtitutes are weak,
With firm, unbiaſt emphaſis to ſpeak.
With genuine nature link perſuaſive art,
And bind in magic ties the willing heart.
She gives to view the Tyrant's naked breaſt,
What guilt diſturbs him, and what fears inſeſt.
She with abhorrence marks the Traitor's name,
And cloaths Ambition in the robes of Shame.
Depreſſes Cruelty; and rears on high
The ſtandard of Imperial liberty.
Is Innocence by rigour ſtern ſubdued?
She ſteels her ſoul with conſcious fortitude.
Bids her above this ſordid earth to riſe,
And claim alliance with her native ſkies.
Who then, by partial error led aſtray,
With haſty cenſure brands the Tragic lay?
The glorious ſtrains which poliſh'd Athens taught,
Refining and exalting human thought?
When Sages praiſed the Poet's moral pen?
And liſtening Heroes felt that they were Men?
What true deſert is their's, at Virtue's call,
Who make th' obedient paſſions riſe or fall!
Who in her Temple bid Mankind appear,
Breathe the warm ſigh, and drop the hallow'd tear!
For when by ideot laughter unpoſſeſt,
She, gentle Goddeſs, ſeeks the ſoften'd breaſt.
From grief itſelf a nameleſs pleaſure flows,
And pity loves to melt at fancied woes.
Not through Antiquity's obſcurer ways,
To climes remote our Britiſh Author ſtrays,
Not from th' Italian, or the French tranſlates,
Alters old plots, or even imitates.
From your own Annals he his ſtory draws,
Tradition long hath crown'd it with applauſe.
When the fierce Danes their barbarous inroads plann'd,
And pour'd deſtruction o'er each harraſt land.
When they beſieged theſe Walls, and hoped to win,
Nor knew ſuperior valour dwelt within:

Till the bold Citizens assail'd their Host,
And drove th' insulting Miscreants from their Coast.
Thus, for their Country, dared your Sires to bleed;
Nor have their Sons disgraced the gallant deed.
Courageous now, as when they quell'd the Dane,
Still faithful, loyal, generous, and humane.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

VOLNIR.
EDRED.
RODOLPH,
ALBERT,
OSWY.
BRITHRIC, or SIGEBERT,
CITIZENS, DANISH CAPTAINS, &c.

GUNHILDA.
EDITHA.

SCENE. EXETER, and the adjacent Country.

EDITHA.

A TRAGEDY.

ACT I.

SCENE I. *A* CAMP. *At ſome diſtance the* CASTLE, *and* CITY *of* EXETER.

VOLNIR. BRITHRIC.

VOLNIR.

SHALL not this City fall beneath my power?
What magic buckler guards it? To my arms,
The puny Offspring of this ſea-girt land
Have yielded whereſoe'er I fought. My ſhips
Beneath their treaſures bend. The ravaged coaſt,
Hence, to the fartheſt Orcades, laments
Her ſlaughter'd Chiefs, and deſolated towns.
What ſay'ſt thou Engliſhman! Our firſt aſſault
Hath proved in vain, will they withſtand another?

BRITHRIC.

No doubt they will. In native courage bold,
The warlike Sons of Iſca ne'er will droop
By ſudden fear o'ercome. To conquer them,

Patience, with ardent valour muſt be joined,
Nor will they yield, till cloſed within the net
Of extreme fate, and dire neceſſity.

VOLNIR.

How doſt thou know their character ſo well?
I thought thou told'ſt me, thou wert born far off,
Upon the banks of Trent?

BRITHRIC.

I told thee true.
But who, within theſe confines, is a ſtranger
To the Damnonian fame? Their worth in arms
Even their foes confeſs. Before theſe walls
For two long tedious months did Sweno mourn,
Illuſtrious Monarch, and with ſhame and rage
Beheld his blaſted laurels. Nor at length,
But by a Norman traitor gain'd the place,
Ignobly gain'd it. Why, O ill-adviſed,
Would'ſt thou ſit down before it?

VOLNIR.

Brithric, hold!
No more with thy ill-omen'd notes preſume
T' infeſt my ear. Haſt thou forgot, old man,
When firſt I ſaw thee in thy boarded ſhip,
The ſad ſurvivor of thy vanquiſh'd crew,
Cover'd with wounds? When I preſerv'd thy life,
And made my foe my friend? For Volnir ne'er
After the rage of fight, could plunge his ſword
In the ungua:ded boſom of the brave.

BRITHRIC.

BRITHRIC.

No Volnir, I can ne'er forget that day.

VOLNIR.

Thou haſt forgot it; elſe why interpoſe
Theſe frigid cautions? Haſt thou e'er with arm
Or counſels, aided me, ſince firſt I urg'd
The tide of war againſt the Anglian ſhore?
Now, by my ſword I ſwear, when I have gain'd
Some glorious victory, theſe eyes have ſeen
Thy cheek bedew'd with tears.

BRITHRIC.

And ſay, could'ſt thou
View Ruin with gigantic ſtride, paſs o'er
Thy Denmark's breaſt unmov'd? No, ſurely no
In other realms thou haſt not ſeen theſe feet
Behind thee linger; my victorious arm
Gothland hath witneſs'd, and the Frank, the Scot
Oft fled before the lightning of my ſpear.
Theſe were my enemies as well as thine.
But can a private tye, e'en gratitude
Strongeſt of all, make me forget the love
I owe my country? Periſh then this arm!
May theſe white locks unſeemly ſtrew the duſt!
When my advice ſhall prompt, or hands dare execut
A guilty deed againſt my native ſoil!

VOLNIR.

Why hath thy native ſoil ne'er paid thy ranſom?

For well I know, thou art not of the race
Of common men.

BRITHRIC.

Why aſk of me a queſtion
Thou beſt can'ſt anſwer? Would'ſt thou have permitted
A meſſenger from me to ſeek my friends,
Long, long e'er now my ranſom had been paid.
Thou know'ſt, tho' pleaſed, the more enlighten'd manners,
And cuſtoms of well-regulated States
By my inſtructions taught, t' exalt me high
Amid thy Warriors, Conqueror as thou art,
Thou know'ſt I have not willingly forſaken
Thoſe I held dear. I left my ſoul's beſt portion,
A valued Wife; a young and growing Daughter,
An infant Son I left. Could I forget
In ſplendid ſlavery theſe tender names?
For life I am thy Debtor, and have ſerv'd
In other wars moſt faithfully. But ſtill
Affection wrings my heart, and liberty
Is unpoſſeſs'd, tho' I without a boaſt
Might claim it as my due.

VOLNIR.

Go, join the foe.
Hence murmurer to the city, and betray
Me, and my army.

BRITHRIC.

Volnir, no, I ſcorn
The paths of baſeneſs. Priſoner, to thee,
Unranſom'd never will I quit thy camp.

SCENE

SCENE II.

Enter RODOLPH, *with* EDITHA, *and other* PRISONERS.

VOLNIR.

Welcome brave Rodolph! Haſt thou well explor'd
The country toward the North?

RODOLPH.

I have. No foe
Dares ſtand againſt us, terror-ſtruck they fly,
And leave to us their numerous herds and flocks.
I traced yon winding ſtream for many a mile,
Through it's luxuriant vale, fit haunt for Gods.
Unlike our blaſted heaths, here Plenty dwells,
Clad in her richeſt robes. Could we poſſeſs
The City, with this ſcene before our view,
Here might we fix our home, and each nerve ſtrung
With double vigour, brave the utmoſt force
Of the whole adverſe Iſle. A region this,
Worthy of none but Denmark's valiant race.
Bear off theſe Priſoners. To my Tent conduct
This trembling fair One. Fear not, gentle Damſel,
Rodolph is thy Protector.

VOLNIR.

Stay awhile.
Whence is that beauteous Maid?

RODOLPH.

A votareſs She.
Immur'd within a neighbouring abbeys walls.
We burſt the gate, and took her thence by force.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Enough. Retire. (*Exeunt* Editha, &c.

Rodolph, it ill becomes
A ſoldier in the clamorous field of war
To ſigh at Beauty's feet. 'Tis our's to teach
The eager ſword to bite the creſted helm:
To call the hawks of Heaven, and bid them mark
The joys of fight; to drench the ground in blood.
Nor, 'till return'd from war, to take the Maid,
Or blooming Widow to our wiſh'd embrace.

RODOLPH.

Fear not my Chief; guarded with ſacred care
She dwells ſecure, 'till placed within my ſhip,
A matchleſs prize.

VOLNIR.

So ſhall thy Chief applaud thee.
Now hear what we have purpoſed. Be it thine
To head a daring Band by me ſelected,
And when the moon dips in the cave of night
Her ſilver brow, to ſcale with ſilent ſtep
Yon caſtle walls; myſelf will on the city
Pour my whole force, and with inceſſant ſtorm
Facilitate thy enterprize.

RODOLPH.

My thoughts
Accord with thine. Plan thou each arduous deed:
And let this heart the bold deſigns fulfill. (*Exit.*)

SCENE

SCENE III.

VOLNIR. BRITHRIC.

VOLNIR.

Mark'd you the Virgin?

BRITHRIC.

I obſerved her well.
Her modeſty, her air above the vulgar,
Her unaffected, ſilent look of woe,
With ſtrange emotions fill'd my heart. I pity her.

VOLNIR.

Her fate is to be envied. Rodolph's valour
Deſerves the faireſt. Where can beauty feel
True pleaſure, but when claſp'd in the embrace
Of the intrepid warrior?

BRITHRIC.

Tender mourner!
Who knows her grief! Her ſad anxiety!
Torn from her Friends! Perhaps an aged Father
Now beats his breaſt, and curſes in deſpair,
The cruel hand of Fate. A frantic Mother
Perhaps now breathes her laſt, in anguiſh wild,
Calling in vain upon her much-loved Daughter.

VOLNIR.

I bluſh to hear this weakneſs; glad am I
None of my noble Danes are witneſſes

To this thy folly; but if thou regard'ſt
My anger, dare not with inglorious wailings
Diſgrace my camp. War is no ſchool of pity.
Nor would I, that the ſpirits of my followers,
Rough and invincible, be e'er degraded
To the ſoft failings of the ſilken Crew,
O'er whom they triumph. Why is ſtrength imparted,
Why the heroic ſoul, but from the baſe
Unmanly graſp of cowards, thoſe poſſeſſions
They merit not to wreſt? Riches and beauty,
The harveſt of their labours?

BRITHRIC.

Is it then
Denied to feel for the afflicted?

VOLNIR.

No;
But rule thy feelings; like a man, ſupport
Thy nature's frailty; feed on grief in ſecret. (*Exit.*)

BRITHRIC.

O curſe! to bear a mind whence ſweet humanity
By barbarous cuſtom is exiled! To know
No virtue, but ferocious brutal courage!
Yet is this Chief ſuperior to his race;
And education which hath ſteel'd his ſoul
To gentle pity, hath not quite eraſed
The native ſenſe of rectitude. He ſpared
My life; and loved a valour like his own.—
The thoughts of this poor Virgin ſtill diſtreſs me.
Such is my Daughter's age.—But ſhe's far diſtant.

It cannot be.—And yet her Mother's features
Roſe to my mind.—'Tis but the ſport of fancy.—
Oh! could I but once more behold my Children,
I then could die in peace.—But who can tell
Whether ſome other band of theſe invaders
May not have ſlain, or hurried them away
To ſad captivity? Perhaps I mourn
The abſence of the dead; or dead to me,
Who never muſt behold them; doom'd to waſte
My days in miſery, and die a ſlave.

Enter RODOLPH.

BRITHRIC.

Haſt thou ſo ſoon left thy fair Priſoner?

RODOLPH.

New to misfortune is the Maid; her ſorrow
Reſiſts all arguments; perſuaſion fails;
Nor will ſhe hear a word of ſoothing comfort.
She will be calm anon. Theſe warmer paſſions
Sooneſt abate. Yet, 'twas a ſcene of terror
From whence I ſnatch'd her; for the fooliſh crew
Their gates had barricadoed, which provoked
My gallant band to deeds of vengeance. All
But ſhe, and one, whom at a poſtern door
A youth bore off upon his rapid ſteed,
Fell victims to the keen relentleſs ſword.

BRITHRIC.

Whence were the other Captives?

RODOLPH.

They were taken
From neighbouring villages, the ſoldier's plunder,
To them by lot diſtributed.

BRITHRIC.

Would'ſt thou,
Should I requeſt it, ſuffer me to viſit
This Captive in thy Tent?

RODOLPH.

Hah! doſt thou know
What 'tis thou aſk'ſt?

BRITHRIC.

I do. Thou would'ſt be willing
To dry her tears?

RODOLPH.

I would.

BRITHRIC.

'Tis for that purpoſe
I aſk an interview. I am her Countryman,
And ſhould I to her ear unfold thy worth,
Thy excellence above the other Chiefs;
Make her of that good fortune ſenſible,
Which, 'mid her depth of woe, to thy poſſeſſion
Devoted her; may not her mind be moved,
Sooth'd by the cheering ſpeech of honeſt age,
And caſt anxiety aſide?

RODOLPH.

RODOLPH.

I'll truſt thee.
Thy ſnowy head proclaims, that in thy breaſt
The flame of warm deſire's long ſince extinct.
Go Brithric. I would bend her to my wiſhes,
But not reluctantly. The ſickly appetite
Of impotence may provocation need
In cold reſiſtance, but my glowing ſoul
Seeks equal paſſion, and the yielding fair
To bleſs, muſt covet bleſſing.—Hence, away!
I wait on Volnir; He hath now demanded
Once more a parley; and the haughty Albert,
Exonia's Præfect, to our Camp draws nigh. (*Exit.*)

BRITHRIC.

Protect theſe towers, kind Heaven! Tho' for the ſins
Of guilty nations, for a time theſe robbers
Bear thy vindictive ſcourge; yet, teach mankind
At length, that ſacrilege and cruelty
Will draw the terrors of thy juſtice down!
That Mercy is thy darling attribute,
And thy arm bared to puniſh, not deſtroy!

ACT II.

SCENE I. VOLNIR's *Tent.* VOLNIR *and his* CAPTAINS.

VOLNIR.

Once more my noble friends, who choſe me willingly
Your leader in this war, I mean to try,
Whether by mild perſuaſion, or by threats,

This Albert may be ſhaken. For tho' frankly
You ruſh amid the tempeſt of the fight,
To you not dreadful, and pour forth your blood,
As well becomes the brave; yet do ye know
To reliſh life, and all it's genuine pleaſures.
For this we leave our barren rocks, to tear
From the luxurious arms of battening ſloth,
Its wealth ſuperfluous, and its gorgeous robes,
Rich gems, and ſpur to every great deſign
The love-exciting Fair. Nor would I raſhly,
When dire neceſſity impels not, urge
Your feet to dangers fatal paths.—Should Albert,
Depending on its ſtrength, refuſe to yield
This well-girt city, He, like other Foes,
May buy our abſence dearly, and bring forth
The hoarded gold and precious moveables,
Which the affrighted Citizens ſhall give
With pleaſure; while we ſeek our native land,
With ſhips full-fraught, bearing a treaſure thither,
Greater than Denmark ever ſaw before.

CAPTAIN.

Conſcious of thy ſuperiour worth, we truſt
To thee our intereſt; in the ſanguine field,
Or mazy treaty, ſtedfaſt to purſue
The path where Volnir, or where Wiſdom leads.

Enter RODOLPH, *with* ALBERT.

RODOLPH.

The Præfect Albert.

VOLNIR.

He does well t' obey
Our ſummons.—Albert welcome.

ALBERT.

Think not Dane,
Tho' proud thy ſpeech, that Albert's acts are govern'd
But by his own free will. 'Tis true I come,
And by thy meſſage prompted; but expecting
No lordly looks to ſee, to hear no terms
Of inſult from a foe we need not dread.
Our bulwarks laugh to ſcorn thy utmoſt force,
Guarded by men, prepared as thou haſt found,
Buried beneath their ruins to expire,
E'er ſtain their ſouls with infamy. I come,
Urged by an impulſe to thy breaſt unknown,
That of humanity. To bid thee fly,
For vengeance is at hand; to bid thee ſpare
The ſtreams of blood, which fate prepares to pour
Over theſe verdant fields. For tho' revenge
Inſpires, tho' to the ravages of war
You join fell cruelty, tho' ſmoaking villages,
Women and children murder'd, well might ſteel
To dire retaliation all our hearts;
Yet, dear is every Citizen to me;
Theſe eyes have ſeen enough of death already.
This hour is thine, retire: the next is our's:
And thy retreat cut off, one general ruin
Involves you all.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Albert, I love thy boldneſs.
A foe thou art, worthy a ſon of Denmark
To cope withal. But haſt thou mark'd our camp?
And warlike preparation? Think not vainly
Thou can'ſt eſcape deſtruction. Fluſh'd with conqueſt
In every country from the frozen ſea
To this delightful region, nought avails
Thy bravery againſt us. Yonder walls
Already totter to their deep-ſet baſe.
Conſult then this humanity of thine,
Open the gates; ſo ſhalt thou ſave the lives
Of thy devoted Citizens, and taſte
Our ampleſt clemency.

ALBERT.

Whence haſt thou gain'd
This confidence, audacious man? Becauſe
So ſpiritleſs was our defence, when lately
We beat thee from our ramparts? When thy braveſt
Fell at our feet in death? And the remainder
To their intrenchments fled? Can this have taught thee
To boaſt? To threaten?—By th' Inhabitants
Of this one town alone thus roughly treated,
When the collected force of Devon burſts
In thunder on thee, as e'er long it will,
Thy Ravens wing, whoſe plumes already moult,
Shall riſe no more; but in the duſt be trod,
Scorn'd by the meaneſt Peaſant of our Iſle.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

So raſhly warm!

ALBERT.

So reaſonably bold.

VOLNIR.

To ceaſe this idle play of language, vain
And foreign to our purpoſe. Should we quit
Theſe girded walls, devoted to our will.—
Your Citizens are rich; ſay, with what ſum
Will they their freedom and their lives redeem?

ALBERT.

Periſh the thought! Were our ſtreets paved with gold,
Expect not Dane from us the ſhining treaſure.
For thee we hoard up nought but ſteel, to which
Thou art right welcome.

VOLNIR.

Be it ſo.—But Albert,
When ruin enters o'er yon towers, when horror
And fell deſtruction riot in your ſtreets,
Accuſe not us of cruelty, the obſtinate
Urge their own fate, our conſciences are free.

ALBERT.

We will acquit thee Dane, till then farewell! (*Exit.*)

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Prepare my Friends! From this determined man
Expect no common ſhock. Each to his poſt!
Yet hath our ſteady and unſhaken valour,
Met greater dangers than his utmoſt power
Can bring in oppoſition, and with eaſe
Subdued them all. Only reſolve to conquer,
And you're already Conquerors. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.

RODOLPH's *Tent.*

EDITHA.

O ſtate of horror! Worſe than death itſelf!
Yes, I would die with pleaſure, to the ſword
Submit my neck, or run to meet the blow.
But ſave me ſpotleſs Heaven! Say, who art thou?
(*Enter* Brithric.)

BRITHRIC.

A Friend, a Countryman, by Rodolph ſent—

EDITHA.

Rodolph! deteſted name!

BRITHRIC.

And why deteſted!
Thou art a ſtranger to his worth, his love—

EDITHA.

EDITHA.

'Tis monſtrous! Name it not. Said'ſt thou his love!
Thou can'ſt not mean it.

BRITHRIC.

Calm theſe tranſports Virgin,
And hear me plead his cauſe.

EDITHA.

I will not hear thee.
'Tis poiſon to mine ears. Diſhoneſt Engliſhman!
Leave me; hence, to the robber who employed thee;
Fitteſt ſociety!

BRITHRIC.

Impaſſion'd thus,
I will not leave thee. Bred up in proſperity,
Thou haſt not taſted miſery's ſad cup,
And therefore view'ſt thy lot with double anguiſh.
But time, with lenient hand will ſoothe thy grief,
And teach thee to repay with gratitude,
The care, the love, the warm deſires of Rodolph.

EDITHA.

Haſt thou out-lived thy feelings? Or art thou
A willing ſlave? A traitor to thy country?
Or wert thou forced upon this odious taſk?
Thou know'ſt me not.—I pity, and forgive thee.

BRITHRIC.

Yet if reſentment for thy Country's wrongs,
Or thy own injuries, if the eſteem
Of honour, and the innate love of virtue
Permit thee not to yield; try what thou can'ſt
To gain forbearance; try diſſimulation;
To feign for honeſt purpoſes is lawful.
He will ſubmit; and lucky opportunity
Perhaps will crown thy wiſdom.

EDITHA.

Baſe adviſer!
Cloſe thy unhallow'd lips. When thee I violate,
O pure Sincerity! O holy Truth,
When I ſhall ceaſe thy mandates to adore!
May ignominy be my portion here,
And Heaven refuſe me happineſs hereafter!
Of all the vices which my ſoul abhors,
There's none whoſe dire communion I would ſhun
Like vile deceit; to every other crime
It forms a path, till the whole breaſt becomes
A ſtore-houſe of pollution.—As for thee,
Whoſe abject mind is ſuited to thy ſtation,
Hence from my ſight, and torture me no more.
For know, I want no counſel but my own.

BRITHRIC.

How I admire this warmth! (*aſide.*) O gentle Maid,
Whoſe anger in ſo juſt a cauſe, delights
The heart attuned in uniſon with thine!

Excuſe

Excuſe an old man's policy, who looks
With tendereſt ſympathy on thy affliction.
Who wiſh'd to prove if thy interior graces
Equal'd thy outward charms. Who knows thy danger,
And would pour forth his blood to give thee ſafety;
For thou art like—O Heaven!

EDITHA.

Can I believe
This ſudden change? Thy face indeed is honeſt.
And thoſe white hairs of age claim reverence.
The tear too wets thy cheek.—But why ſuſpect me?
Thy trial ſhews thou did'ſt. Can with Integrity
Suſpicion dwell? So odious a companion?

BRITHRIC.

'Twas not ſuſpicion, I diſclaim its weakneſs.
'Twas chance, 'twas curioſity, deſire
To have thee higher riſe in my eſteem.
'Twas any thing but a deſign to injure
Thy purity of ſoul. When firſt I ſaw thee,
Methought my heart was link'd to thine, I vow'd
To do thee ſervice; but alas! what ſervice
Can I, a wretched priſoner afford!
I may lament, but cannot reſcue thee.

EDITHA.

O Edred where art thou! O Bertha! Bertha!

BRITHRIC.

What ſaid'ſt thou! What!

EDITHA.

Whence is this wild emotion?
Why doſt thou fix thy eyes, and gaze thus on me?

BRITHRIC.

Did'ſt thou not mention Edred?

EDITHA.

What of him!

BRITHRIC.

And Bertha too?

EDITHA.

I did.

BRITHRIC.

Are they thy Friends?

EDITHA.

My Mother and my Brother.

BRITHRIC.

And thy name?—

EDITHA.

Is Editha.

BRITHRIC.

Thy Father?—

EDITHA.

Was Earl Sigebert.

BRITHRIC.

I, I am he; O Editha! my Child!
I am thy long-loſt Father, I am Sigebert.

EDITHA.

My Father! Is it poſſible! My Father!

BRITHRIC.

I am indeed. Oh! I am wild with joy.

EDITHA.

And ſhall I know the bleſſing of a Father!

BRITHRIC.

Thou ſhalt, thou ſhalt. Oh! not the light itſelf,
Not the warm blood which gives me motion, ſenſe,
Shall be ſo dear to me. I thought I ſaw
The features of my Bertha. O my Child!
My lovely Editha!—But in this place!
And in this Rodolph's power! Ye Angels ſtoop,
Stoop on your wings of grace, and ſave my Child!
Where is that beſt of women? Where is Bertha?
And where thy Brother? Are they not in Mercia?
By what ſtrange myſtery art thou priſoner here?

EDITHA.

O my dear Father! (to pronounce that name
Thrills my whole ſoul with pleaſure.) Edred's valour,

And

And youthful merit, won the royal favour
Of our great maſter Ethelred. Another
Poſſeſſes thy inheritance; to him
He gave domains which far exceeded thine,
Here, in the bounds of Devon, ample rights,
Foreſts, and large command. Thy ſad misfortune
Was in this grateful bounty not forgotten.
For long we've thought thee dead, unnumber'd tears
Hath Bertha pour'd, and ſtill the painful ſigh
Oft ſwells her boſom. When ſhe heard thy ſhip
Was by a tempeſt ſever'd from the reſt,
She fear'd the greedy waves had ſwallow'd it,
And mourn'd in bittereſt woe her huſbands death.

BRITHRIC.

Oh! had it not been ſever'd, Denmark's Sons
Had not ſo long ſpread ruin o'er my country;
I had not yielded to this Daniſh Chief,
Oppreſs'd by numbers; nor with him dragg'd out
Eighteen long years of tedious ſervitude.
Nor had the Father and the Daughter thus
Met helpleſs captives. But where is She now?
And where my Son?

EDITHA.

This morn when laſt I ſaw them—
Oh! thou recall'ſt the dreadful ſcene of blood,
The horrid maſſacre. Within that ſanctuary
Had Bertha and myſelf retired for ſafety.
When at one gate the Foe demanded entrance,
We heard the voice of Edred at the other.

Either

Either by chance, or fearing their intent
He came, but unattended; ſtrait he placed
My Mother on his courſer, and out-ſtripp'd
The winds for her deliverance.

BRITHRIC.

Noble Youth!

EDITHA.

By this, no doubt, he hath regain'd the city.
Where, with his houſhold train, in deeds of danger
He is the foremoſt, and encourages
The moſt remiſs to action.

BRITHRIC.

O my Daughter!
Grief mingles with my joy.—Preſerve him Heaven!
And lead him on to victory!—For thee
I weep my Editha. Ah! what avails it
That thou wert ſnatch'd from ſlaughter, if thou now
Muſt be expoſed to ſavage violation!

EDITHA.

Let us not murmur. That almighty power
Who ſaved me there as by a miracle,
Can here ſupport me.

BRITHRIC.

In that power I truſt.
But I muſt guard thee with a Father's love;
And dangerous is the path I ſhall purſue.

I'll hence to Volnir, in whoſe breaſt I claim
Some ſhare of confidence, to him diſcloſe
Rodolph's inſtructions, his deſign on thee;
I will enlarge on his inglorious paſſion.
So ſtrict his diſcipline, he will, I know,
Divide you till they re-embark. Mean-time
I may deviſe ſome other plan to ſave thee.

EDITHA.

To thee, and Heaven, do I commit myſelf.

BRITHRIC.

Farewell my Child! I could almoſt perſuade
My old fond heart, that innocence, like thine,
Might melt the moſt relentleſs ſon of Denmark
To ſoft humanity.—Farewell! Farewell! *(Exit.)*

EDITHA.

Farewell! May all-overwatching Providence
Aſſiſt thy pious care, and ſhield thy Daughter!

Enter RODOLPH.

RODOLPH.

Once more, my beauteous Captive, e'er I plunge
Amid the ſtorm of war, I come to hear
More gentle accents from thy mouth, to meet
More gentle glances from thy eyes.—Hath Brithric,
My Friend, thy ancient Countryman been with thee?

EDITHA.

EDITHA.

He hath.

RODOLPH.

Thou view'ſt me with the look of ſcorn.
And his perſuaſions have not overcome
That ſtubborn heart.

EDITHA.

Away! I would reproach thee.
But ſentiments like mine will prompt a language
Thou can'ſt not underſtand.

RODOLPH.

Hah! Do'ſt thou know
My power o'er thee is abſolute?

EDITHA.

I know it.
To wounds, to accidents, to violence,
This outward frame is ſubject; but the mind
Enjoys her glorious freedom uncontroul'd.

RODOLPH.

Nor have I hurt that mind, tho' privileged
By war and conqueſt.

EDITHA.

Rather ſay by ſacrilege,
Rapine, and cruelty. All other nations

Reſpect the Matron and the hoary Sire,
Melt at the Virgin's and the Infant's tear.
Thy ſavage race, intent on ruthleſs ſlaughter,
Heeds none of theſe; nor can the holieſt places
Protect them from their fury. Like the Tiger,
Which loves to ſwim in blood, and tears the flock,
Tho' gorged with food in frantic wantonneſs.

RODOLPH.

What treatment can a foe expect but death,
Or ſlavery, from a foe? We have not yet
Enervated our minds by ſouthern manners.
Nurſed in the arms of war, I love the fight,
The whizzing arrow, and the flying ſpear,
The clang of ſhields, and tempeſt of the field.
To love my Country, and to hate my Enemy,
Be mine. What virtue can exalt the ſoul
Of man, but courage.

EDITHA.

Mercy and compaſſion,
Which bind a wreathe around the Warriors helm,
And lead his footſteps in the paths of glory.

RODOLPH.

And guard him doubtleſs in the day of battle!
By theſe your Engliſhmen have fought ſo bravely,
And with reſiſtleſs ardour ſtopp'd our courſe.
Such virtues ever may my foes poſſeſs!

EDITHA.

O blind to truth! Uncivilized Barbarian!
With what diſdain the poliſh'd ſoul beholds
The man who ſinks himſelf beneath the brutes!

RODOLPH.

No more. Thou wilt perchance repent this pride.

EDITHA.

No; I deſpiſe thee from a nobler motive;
I ſoar above thee, conſcious of a dignity
Thy heart ne'er felt, the dignity of virtue.

RODOLPH.

That be thy ſolace here! I go to execute
My Chief's commands. The moon hath left the Heavens,
The clouds of night hang o'er the ſleeping city,
And lull it to its fate. Tho' cloath'd with beauty,
Excelling all my eyes have ſeen before,
Yet think not I ſhall ſoothe, and fawn, and kneel,
For favours in my power.—Thou art my Captive.

EDITHA.

But am thy Captive only while I pleaſe.
Think'ſt thou I prize my life beyond my honour?

RODOLPH.

The words of many a Fair, who, to enhance
The boon, would make it difficult to win.

So far I've been thy Lover, when I next
Return with victory, expect thy Maſter. (*Exit.*)

EDITHA.

A Slave! A Maſter!—Yet I could ſubmit
To the moſt humble ſervile offices,
With innocence, companion of my toil.
If my own heart reproach'd me not, nor ſhame
Sat kindling on my cheek.—And could I leave
My native Country? Leave my Friends? My Brother?
A Mother, who her being wrapt in mine,
Lives but in me? O my dear long-loſt Father!
So lately found! Save, ſave me from the thought!
Yet, what can'ſt thou! A ſlave to theſe Barbarians!
A wretched ſlave!—Oh! never ſhall I ſee
My Parents meet, a witneſs to their joy,
I ſhall not tend their age, and ſmooth its cares,
Or drop the pious tear upon their grave.—
Who knows my future fate!—My ſoul ſhrinks back!
Nor through the horrid gloom dares penetrate.
O thou Supreme o'er all! To whom I bend
With humbleſt duty, let thy power be ſhewn!
Confound tyrannic force! Support the weak!
And from afflictions ſoul remove deſpair!

SCENE III. *The* CITY.

ALBERT *and* CITIZENS.

ALBERT.

The time requires our ſtricteſt vigilance.
Is the watch doubled? Haſt thou viſited
Each quarter of the ramparts?

CITIZEN.

CITIZEN.

I have.

ALBERT.

Protected by our walls, and more
By love of liberty, by brave diſdain,
And hatred t'ward our unrelenting foes,
We need not fear.—This bold Adventurer,
Equal to Swein in bravery and conduct,
Whoſe fame in arms hath call'd forth Denmark's Sons,
By choice to follow his unfolded ſtandard,
Shall, with his numerous hoſt, or ſtarve beneath
Our unſcaled mounds, or ſeek their ſhips with ſhame,
If, (as I truſt you will), with ſteady valour,
You guard your native city; if your deeds
Anſwer in future to your laſt days actions.
And lo! where comes our ſuccour and ſupport,
Heroic Edred!—Noble Youth, right welcome!
Thou haſt ſucceeded in thy enterprize?

EDRED.

In part, and but in part.—Alas my Friend!
What we this morning dreaded is complete.
Th' inhuman Dane no holy place reveres.
The abbey is deſpoil'd, the virgin train
Murder'd. Aſſiſted by the hand of Heaven,
Bertha is ſaved.—But Oh! My noble Siſter!
How cruel is her fate! A priſoner
To theſe Barbarians! Seeing them retreat,
I turn'd my ſteps, and ſought among the ſlain,
She was not to be found.—I have not time

To tell thee all; for as with ſtealthy pace,
Skreen'd by the gloom of night, thro' ſecret paths
The careful foe I ſhunn'd, methought I heard
A ſound confuſed of feet and murmuring voices,
And ſtrait the glimpſe of armour caught my eye.
Some action is on foot; they ſeem'd to me
As winding t'ward the Caſtle.

ALBERT.

Let them come.
They ſteal not on a ſleeping enemy;
We are prepared: and as a lofty rock
Beats back the furious waves which rage in vain,
So ſhall before our well-mann'd battlements
Theſe ravagers retire.—I ſee thy grief
Thou gallant Youth; and for thy hapleſs Siſter
Feel ſimilar emotions to thy own.
The lovely Editha all hearts confeſs
Unparagon'd in beauty, and in virtue.

EDRED.

Oh! witneſs Heaven! no common love I bore her!
No Brother ever better loved a Siſter;
And ſhe deſerved my love.—Her active ſoul
Soaring above the weakneſs of her ſex,
My younger ſpirit raiſed to glorious daring.
When but a Boy, ſhe to my liſtening ear,
Taught all the martial deeds of my great Anceſtors.
She ſet before my eye my Father's virtues,
(Whoſe early death my Mother ever mourns:)
And bade me tread like them the paths of fame.

If aught within this breaſt tranſcends the vulgar,
To her the debt is due, the generous fire
By her was kindled.

ALBERT.

'Twas unfortunate——

EDRED.

Oh! it was greatly ſo. That they ſhould think
The ties of faith would check thoſe lawleſs robbers!
That I ſhould ſuffer them to put in practice
So idle a reſolve! Expoſed to danger,
When here with us they might have dwelt in ſafety.
For what is ſacred to the Daniſh race?
They ſpare not hoary age, nor innocence
Within its Mother's claſping arms inſhrined,
Nor e'en religion at the hallow'd altar.

ALBERT.

Would I could comfort thee!

EDRED.

That wiſh is vain.
Nor ſeek I any comfort but revenge.
Join with me there my Friend! Let us this inſtant
Pour forth the tide of fury on their camp.
My eager ſword is thirſty for revenge.
The holy Virgins weltering in their blood,
My raviſh'd Siſter's wrongs now urge me on,
String all my nerves, and fill my ſoul with ardour.

ALBERT.

Thou haſt forgot thy tidings.—But whate'er
Shall happen, all is ready for defence,
Or vigorous onſet; by each public motive,
And private ſentiment impell'd, this arm
Shall join with thine in boldeſt enterprize;
And deep upon the Daniſh creſts, inſcribe
In bloody characters, the holy compact.
But much I wonder, Oſwy with his powers
Is not as yet arrived; this morn he ſent
A meſſenger, who told me e'er the ſun
Set in the Weſt, we ſhould behold his camp
Pitch'd on the neighbouring hills; with haſty march,
He, from the bounds of Tamar, to our aid
Approaches.

EDRED.

Never did my heart eſteem
That Lord; in words, moſt fierce, in action, cold;
Of crafty and deſigning nature, he,
A ſlave to avarice, and inherent baſeneſs.

ALBERT.

He hath a beauteous Daughter.

EDRED.

True, he hath;
Gunhilda. With an ample dower to me
He would have given the Maid; but underneath
The veil of faireſt ſemblance, I beheld

A ſoul

A ſoul too like her Father's, and refuſed her.
Since which enraged, they ever have purſued me
With baſe inſidious hate, which I deſpiſe.
(*A Trumpet ſounds.*)

ALBERT.

The ſignal of alarm! (*Enter a* Citizen.)

CITIZEN.

Our ſcouts inform us
A party of the foe, in deepeſt ſilence,
Is climbing the aſcent toward the Caſtle.
Another party to the Eaſtern gate,
With rapid haſte advances.

ALBERT.

This my Edred,
This is the wiſh'd-for hour, the hour of glory!
She holds her prize aloft, and animates
The choſen breaſt with tenfold intrepidity.—
The Caſtle be thy care; we guard the gate.
And now my Friend, the Warrior's courteſy,
One brief embrace!—The reſt belongs to Heaven.

EDRED.

And Heaven is juſt.—My keen-edged ſword I draw,
Which ſhall not to its ſcabbard be reſtored,
Till drench'd and ſatiated with Daniſh blood. (*Exeunt.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I. *The* CAMP. VOLNIR'S *Tent.*

VOLNIR, RODOLPH, *and* DANISH CAPTAINS.

VOLNIR.

Again repulſed! Again with ſhame compell'd
To ſeek our camp! The Daniſh Genius droops.
Oh! where was Rodolph's matchleſs valour! Where
That untamed ſpirit wont to riſe ſuperiour
To every obſtacle! The waves of chance
To ſtem with ſteady breaſt, and gain the ſhore!
To preſs againſt the hand of oppoſition,
And urge his way more ſwiftly for reſiſtance!
But love, fond love enſlaved the Warrior's heart,
Beauty's ſoft chains had ſhackled his bold ſpirit,
And he was conquer'd e'er he fought the fight.
Now, by my ſoul, thou ſeeſt the Fair no more,
Till we have laid thoſe turrets in the duſt,
And ſteer our courſe t'ward Denmark.

RODOLPH.

Theſe reproaches
No doubt become thee well. Injuſtice ever
With weak excuſes vindicates its actions.
Scarce can I truſt my ears; theſe taunts from thee!
But I'm perhaps a ſtranger, and thou never
Beheld'ſt my footſteps in the crimſon field,
Or ſword deſtructive dealing ſlaughter round.

And didſt thou take my Captive from my Tent?
And do I live and bear this injury?

VOLNIR.

No more raſh man. Learn thou thy duty better.
Did I not charge thee not to woe the Maid?
What! ſhall our camp be changed into a ſchool
Of wanton dalliance? Of inglorious love?
Our deeds depend not on the breath of Rodolph.
We judge, we act, from reaſon's firm reſolves.

RODOLPH.

Oh! would we were in Denmark! I ſhould there
Meet thee thy equal. See my friends, the man,
Who acts, who judges, as firm reaſon dictates!
He ſaw the beauteous priſoner, he loved her,
And from his envied Rival took the Maid.
But love no doubt is glorious in the Chief,
And baſe unmanly dalliance in the Soldier.

VOLNIR.

What power withholds, that now I ruſh not on thee,
And ſmite thee to the earth?—The fixed ſoul,
Which conſcious of its rectitude, deſpiſes
A madman's calumny.—But urge no farther.
It may be dangerous.—Yet, hear me all!
And thou attend!—In yonder Tent incloſed,
She dwells, to me as tho' ſhe not exiſted,
Or was not form'd of mortal elements,
And ſubject to the paſſions of mankind.
No private end I ſeek; the public good

Is all my care; and from the warm emotion
A bar of froſt ſecures this ſettled boſom.
Retire; and in thy Tent converſe with ſhame,
Th' attendant of unguarded liberty,
And thoughtleſs Youth. I pardon thee. Begone.
(*Exit.* Rodolph.)

Enter a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER.

As in our fartheſt limits t'ward the City,
I with my fellows held obſervant watch,
A Damſel croſſ'd our way with two attendants.
She bade us ſtraitway lead her to our Chief,
And begs to be admitted to thy preſence.

VOLNIR.

Bring her before us.

Enter GUNHILDA.

VOLNIR.

'Mid the paths of death,
And throng of hoſtile arms, fay gentle Maid,
What brings thee hither at this hour of night?

GUNHILDA.

Art thou the much-famed leader of the Danes?

VOLNIR.

My name is Volnir,

GUNHILDA.

GUNHILDA.

Hail illuſtrious Chief!
My errand is to thee, and my requeſt
The favour of thy private ear.

VOLNIR.

Retire. (*To the Attendants.*)
Thy will is granted. From a meſſenger
So beauteous, and ſo rare, I may expect
No common tidings. Whence? and who art thou?

GUNHILDA.

From Devon's Weſt extreme I come; a Friend
To thee and Denmark.

VOLNIR.

How a Friend? Proceed.

GUNHILDA.

Art thou ambitious o'er this town to triumph?
To gird the Conqueror's laurel round thy brow?
And all thy valiant hoſt enrich with plunder?
A female tongue ſhall teach thee how to act.

VOLNIR.

Whoe'er thou art, whatever be thy counſel,
Thou read'ſt my wiſh aright.

GUNHILDA.

I am the Daughter
Of Oſwy, powerful Chief, a name to thee
Well-known,

Well-known, my name Gunhilda. In our veins
Flows Daniſh blood; e'er that inhuman maſſacre
Deſtroy'd thy Countrymen, by holy union
Of marriage 'twas acquired.

VOLNIR.

Say on fair Damſel.

GUNHILDA.

Thus then; my Father with a mighty aid
Is near at hand prepared to raiſe this ſiege;
So Albert credits, ſo the Citizens.
But if thy heart conſents with his, to terms
Which I ſhall now propoſe, the town is thine.

VOLNIR.

What bond coercive anſwers for his faith?

GUNHILDA.

I will remain with thee a willing Hoſtage.

VOLNIR.

'Tis well; the terms unfold.

GUNHILDA.

On Oſwy's part
He promiſes, when Hoſt with adverſe Hoſt
Is mix'd in fight, to fly with all his troops.
Then while the Citizens confuſedly urge
Their way toward the walls, thy Friends may enter

With

With the affrighted croud. Or e'er two days
Are paſt, when he is in the City poſted,
He will, the gate committed to his care,
To thee deliver at a certain hour.
From thee he aſks in coin, in plate, or gems,
Secretly given, a third part of the ſpoil.
He wiſhes thee to curb impetuous rage,
Nor ſhed unneceſſary blood, but one,
One odious life he at thy hands requires.

VOLNIR.

Name the devoted victim.

GUNHILDA.

Edred; he
Who every needy artizan inſpires
With pride, and every vile mechanic breaſt
With obſtinacy. He it is who checks thy courſe,
Thy greateſt enemy and our's.

VOLNIR.

I know
The Youth; when firſt we for this ſiege prepared,
He came with Albert, and defied our power.
Bold were his words, and ſtately was his mien.
I ſaw him afterwards like lightning pierce
Our thickeſt ranks, his fury-front to front
Rodolph oppoſed, and deſperate was the fight;
But Rodolph's arm prevailed not. On he ruſh'd,
And havock mark'd his way. This night again
His valour foil'd us; he, our priſoners ſay,

The

The Citadel defended. We accept
Thy terms fair Stranger. To the noble Oſwy,
We ſwear the third part of the ſpoil to give,
And Edred's forfeit life.

GUNHILDA.

He aſks no more.
The firſt he claims a debt of juſtice, due
From thee to his deſerts; the laſt, a ſacrifice
To the diminiſh'd honour of his houſe,
And ſullied name. 'Twere long, nor need I tell
The cauſe of his deſired revenge; enough
That Edred is beyond expreſſion baſe,
Vile, contumelious, and that we would ſee,
With pleaſure ſee this Iſland from its baſe
Torn by an earthquake, and with all its rocks
Plunged in the main, ſo he might ſink beneath
The ponderous ruins.

VOLNIR.

Be it as thou wilt
My generous Hoſtage. We will pay the debt
Of juſtice and of vengeance. Were he placed
Within our power, had he a thouſand lives
He dies.

GUNHILDA.

That thought gives comfort to my ſoul.
For that I braved the horrors of the night,
That ſteel'd the weaker nature of my ſex,
And brought me hither ſpite of danger's frown,
And the pale eye of fear.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Diſmiſs all fear.
Here thou art ſafe as in thy Father's palace.
My hardy Danes ſhall form a bulwark round thee,
As round the temple of ſome ſacred power,
By whoſe ſuperiour aid they may obtain
Each ſplendid trophy of triumphant war,
Wealth, conqueſt, and renown.—Lead to the tent
Of Rodolph's captive, this illuſtrious ſtranger
Collect a band of the moſt beauteous ſlaves
To wait upon her perſon. She demands
Reſpect and reverence from each Son of Denmark.

GUNHILDA.

Collect them not; I need not their attendance.
Send back with ſpeedy diligence my guides.
'Tis meet I ſhould be private. To thy worth
I truſt, great Chief, for ſafety and protection.

VOLNIR.

We all are thine, and with obſequious readineſs
Shall thy commands obey.

GUNHILDA.

My confidence
Is fully tried, I thank thee for thy care. (*Exit.*)

VOLNIR.

What ſmall events may ſhake the firmeſt States!
Armies deſtroy, and ſack imperial Cities!

The verieſt trifles oftentimes beget
Important conſequences. Private ſpleen,
A female pique, perhaps a fooliſh quarrel,
A diſappointed paſſion, or the ſting
Of wayward pride, betrays without a blow
This town, which I almoſt deſpair'd to win
By open force. Chance governs all below.
To Britiſh treachery, Britiſh valour yields.
The rich reward, and golden harveſt mine. (*Exit.*)

SCENE II. *The* CITY.

EDRED, OSWY, ALBERT.

EDRED.

This cold advice is out of ſeaſon Oſwy.
I would not give to them a moment's reſpite.
Why not purſue the path where Fortune leads?
While yet they droop, and ſtruck with fear, lament
Our proſperous arms, let us attack their camp.
E'er the grey dawn appears above the hills,
When heavy ſleep weighs down their lids o'er-watch'd,
Let us in ſilence to their tents proceed,
Then like a whirlwind on their ſquadrons ruſh,
And wake them from repoſe to breathe their laſt.

OSWY.

Was it for this, with rapid march I came
To your relief? And muſt experience ſtoop
To the raſh fervour of impatient youth?
To-morrow, by th' addition of my forces,

Who

Who now fatigued and ſpiritleſs, require
Refreſhment due, you gain a certain victory.
To paſs by the indignity you offer
By this attempt to me; why ſhould you court
Unneceſſary peril? Rather why
With headlong madneſs hurry on to meet
Inevitable fate, and ſure deſtruction?

EDRED.

There is a time, when what the calmer tongue
Stiles raſhneſs, is the voice of trueſt wiſdom.
Had we not tried theſe Danes thou might'ſt perſuade us
That they are unaffailable, exempt
From wounds, nor ſubject to mortality.
Indignity to thee by this attempt!
We mean it not. E'er thou wert in the city,
Our plan was laid, our choſen bands prepared.
But ſhould we fight, nay, overcome without thee,
Say, ſhould'ſt thou not rejoice whatever hand
Laid low thy Country's Foes? The patriot heart
Diſclaims each intereſted ſentiment,
Nor heeds falſe glory but the public good.

ALBERT.

And Oſwy ſurely ſeeks the public good,
Tho' differing in opinion. This attack
Was pre-determined; and I think it bears
A ſeemly aſpect. For thy ſpeed we thank thee,
And for thy caution Oſwy. We ſhall guide,
Doubt not, this enterprize with prudence. Thou
See that thy harraſt troops be well refreſh'd.

This night's attempt, if with ſucceſs uncrown'd,
Will not impede but that we join to-morrow,
And with united ſtrength engage the Danes.

OSWY.

Proſperity attend you! tho' I fear
The circumſpection of the enemy,
And tremble for th' event. (*Exit.*)

EDRED.

The daſtard ſpirit,
Not e'en a beam from Heaven could enkindle.
The lukewarm Oſwy trembles for th' event.
He fears leſt we ſhould conquer. Envy, fraud,
And every creeping paſſion fills his breaſt.
But as we know him, ſo we ſhall not truſt him.
Now let us hence, and join our ardent bands,
Who cover'd by the friendly veil of night,
Shall hurl confuſion thro' the adverſe Hoſt.

ALBERT.

No tardineſs is mine—I haſte before—
The needful orders ſhall with ſpeed be given. (*Exit.*)

EDRED.

O Editha! My Siſter! Hapleſs Maid!
Not for my Country only, but for thee
Form'd I this bold adventure.—Generous Albert!
He too reveres thy virtues.—Thro' the gloom
I ſee methinks thy injured form wave on
Our daring ſteps! The deſart Lioneſs

Seeks

Seeks not her raviſh'd young with greater rage,
Than I will thro' theſe ſpoilers cut my way,
To reſcue thee, or gain a glorious death. (*Exit.*)

SCENE III. *The* CAMP. VOLNIR'S *Tent.*

VOLNIR *and one of his* CAPTAINS.

VOLNIR.

'Tis full of hope and probability.
They hate each other; and their civil diſcord
Will work our great advantage. But be ſecret,
Nor let a word tranſpire, 'till opportunity
Call us to inſtant action.—Hah! Gunhilda
Again before us! (*Enter* Gunhilda.)

GUNHILDA.

Pardon this intruſion.
And yet my tidings are of ſuch import
As well deſerve thy audience. But firſt ſwear,
If I by other means than thoſe propoſed,
Procure thee a full ranſom for the City,
Thou wilt perform thy part without reſerve.

VOLNIR.

By every holy tye I bind myſelf.

GUNHILDA.

Judge my ſurprize, when in my Tent I found,
In Rodolph's captive Virgin, Edred's Siſter.
She knew me too; and thinks I am a priſoner:

For

For I amuſed her with a piteous tale
Of feign'd diſtreſs.—He loves this Siſter well.—
And to this Deity the Præfect Albert
Is thought to offer incenſe; by her wiles
Enticed to adoration.—Would they not,
To ſave her life, ſubmit to pay what price
Thou may'ſt impoſe?—Let Edred be the Hoſtage.
Two ſhares receive, and for the third, ſlay him,
And we'll acquit thee.—Thus my noble Father,
Without ſuſpicion, and abſolved of danger,
His foe's deſtruction ſhall enjoy; the traſh,
The ſordid traſh relinquiſh'd.

VOLNIR.

In thy boſom
A more than manly ſoul reſides Gunhilda,
In policy and courage far beyond
The little weakneſs of inferiour minds,
High-ſoaring o'er the vulgar!—Thy deſires,
If they accept our terms ſhall be fulfill'd.
Our gratitude to thee ſhall know no bounds.
Lead hither Editha, the captive Maid. (*Exit* Captain.)
The dread of death perhaps will make her ſupplicate
Her Brother's quick deciſion in our favour.
A letter ſhe ſhall write, 'twill to our meſſage
Add double weight.—Do thou retire Gunhilda;
Late is the hour of night: go, ſeek repoſe. (*Exit* Gunhilda.)

Enter EDITHA.

EDITHA.

Why am I ſummon'd hither?

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Edred's Siſter!—
Nay, ſtart not; Thou art known.

EDITHA.

Thou know'ſt me then
Born of a race, on which, tho' full of worthies,
The deeds of Edred caſt ſublimer luſtre.

VOLNIR.

He is our deadly Foe.

EDITHA.

He loves his Country.

VOLNIR.

Thee too he loves.

EDITHA.

With tendereſt affection.

VOLNIR.

Then hear me Virgin.—If he loves his Country,
He wiſhes not the iron hand of war
To waſte theſe fields; he wiſhes not to ſee
Devouring flames inwrap yon lofty towers.

EDITHA.

Heaven ſhield him from the ſight!

VOLNIR.

'Tis thou muſt ſhield him.

EDITHA.

What ſay'ſt thou Dane!

VOLNIR.

We know thy influence o'er him.
Exert thy winning talents of perſuaſion;
Write him our terms, and beg him to accept them.
We, for a ſtipulated ſum, will quit
This ſhore for ever.

EDITHA.

Never will I write
What Edred would peruſe with ſhame and ſcorn.

VOLNIR.

Take heed: thy life is loſt by his refuſal.

EDITHA.

A life of little conſequence compared
With Edred's glory, and my Country's fame.

VOLNIR.

Can'ſt thou ſupport the thoughts of death?

EDITHA.

I can.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Of torture?

EDITHA.

Ceaſe thy cruel threats Barbarian!
And know the ſufferings nature cannot bear,
Religion can unterrified encounter.

VOLNIR.

Prepare thee for the trial.—Yet thy freedom
Would follow his conſent.

EDITHA.

To wear for ever
The worſt of chains, my own reproaching conſcience.

VOLNIR.

Will nothing bend thy mind?

EDITHA.

To what effect?

VOLNIR.

To ſave thyſelf? Thy Country? And thy Friends?

EDITHA.

Can aught incline that ſoul to foul diſhonour,
Which looks on thee, on all thy warrior Hoſt,
On all the tranſient glories of this world,

Its crouded cities, realms, and mighty empires,
As nothing, when compared with vaſt eternity?

VOLNIR.

Enthuſiaſtic notions!

EDITHA.

Reaſon thus
Is to the madman folly; moderate aims
To wild ambition; mercy to the tyrant.

VOLNIR.

This inſtant ſend a trumpet to the city,
With him a truſty meſſenger, to whom
Our mind impart. Let him acquaint young Edred,
Unleſs he move the Citizens to grant
The ſum we ſhall require, his Siſter dies.
If he return to us with his refuſal,
That moment is her laſt. (*Exit* Captain.)

EDITHA.

And think'ſt thou Edred
Will ſtoop ignobly to perform a deed
A Woman can deſpiſe?—Miſtaken Man!
Whoſe courage is barbarity, whoſe policy
Is ſhallow cunning! Wiſdom throned above,
Beyond thy feeble ken, with virtue joined,
Looks down on thee with ſcorn.—Heroic Edred
Will ne'er diſgrace his high illuſtrious line;
Nor, to preſerve a Siſter, loſe himſelf.

VOLNIR.

VOLNIR.

Lead her away! (*Exit* Editha.)

VOLNIR.

There is a dignity,
An inexpreſſive grace, when Goodneſs utters
Her glowing language thro' the lips of Beauty.—
Even my heart is moved, and were I placed
In lower ſtation, might give way to pity.
But now my Danes this ſacrifice demand,
And Oſwy's Daughter.—'Tis not for a Chief
To yield to private and more humble feelings.
He muſt conſult the genius of his people.
Mine thrive by innate courage and ferocity;
By ſcattering dire diſmay among the nations;
And ruſh to conqueſt thro' the paths of terror. (*Exit.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE I. *The Tent of* EDITHA.

EDITHA, GUNHILDA.

EDITHA.

Link'd as we are in ſad captivity,
I bid adieu to every private quarrel,
And thank thee for thy pity.

GUNHILDA.

Why not write?
The generous ſoul of Edred ſure would melt;
And to avert thy fate——

EDITHA.

Ceaſe Virgin, ceaſe.
'Twere impious to ſuppoſe it.

GUNHILDA.

Yet the voice
Of nature is commanding, to obey
Its dictates, lawful.

EDITHA.

I acknowledge it,
When nature leagues with rectitude. If not,
Blind is her boaſted guidance, and may lead
The devious foot, 'mid all the mazy wilds,
And all the fatal labyrinths of vice.
Truſt me Gunhilda, not the wealth of worlds
Should tempt me to this deed.—Would'ſt thou to reign
O'er the wide univerſe, betray thy Country?

GUNHILDA.

Doſt thou ſuſpect I would?

EDITHA.

Suſpect thee! No.
Th' advice thou gaveſt me was not from thy heart.
'Twas inconſiderate ſympathy alone;
A weakneſs ſpringing from a generous motive.
Oh! Heaven forefend, that I ſhould e'er believe
A Britiſh Maid, of noble birth, like thee,

Would

Would coolly prompt me to commit an action
Of baſe diſhonour.

GUNHILDA.

Did'ſt thou ſo believe
Thy judgment would be ſo raſh, and moſt unjuſt.

EDITHA.

I blame thee not. Thou feel'ſt for my afflictions,
And would'ſt, if poſſible, preſerve my life.
But I muſt die Gunhilda, o'er my head
Fate is impendent. Yet hath death with me
Loſt half his terrors; death is my deliverer.
No more expoſed to brutal treatment, now
Unblemiſh'd to the grave I ſhall deſcend,
Nor yet inglorious in my Country's annals.
May not my lot be happier far than thine?
Oh! can I ſpeak it!—Thou art doom'd perhaps
To ſavage violence.—Unawed by faith,
Strangers to that religion they profeſs,
Theſe ill-converted pagans ſtill retain
All their original fierceneſs.—I muſt drop
Amid my own calamities, a tear
For thee Gunhilda.

GUNHILDA.

I for both will weep.

EDITHA.

And yet I feel a pang, a pang ſevere.
Strong are affections, ſtrong are nature's bonds.

Each

Each Friend, now doubly amiable, appears
Before my tortured mind.—And Oh! Gunhilda!
A Father lately found.

GUNHILDA.

A Father!

EDITHA.

Sigebert;
Long mourn'd by us as dead; preſerved; alive,
Here in this hoſtile camp I found a Father.

GUNHILDA.

Moſt ſtrange!

EDITHA.

Long time a wretched ſlave to Volnir;
And undiſcover'd under Brithric's name.
He ſaved me from the horrors of pollution;
But cannot now avert the ſtroke of death,
Or ſhield himſelf from the extremity
Of poignant anguiſh.—Thus to meet his Daughter!
The thought is dreadful!—Help me to recall,
O Virgin! help me to recall my mind;
And with calamity like this oppreſſ'd,
To re-aſſume my fortitude; for much,
Much do I need it all.

GUNHILDA.

Alas! what aid
Can I impart? My words would flow in vain.
Brithric the preſent name he bears! 'Tis well. (*Aſide.*)

EDITHA.

EDITHA.

Yet will I ſtrive, yet ſtruggle with my weakneſs.
May I not prove victorious? 'Tis for guilt
To tremble; innocence ſhould ſtand unmoved.
O righteous Heaven, with patience ſteel my ſoul!
With reſignation! in the hour of trial
Guide me! ſupport me! and tho' death be mine,
Crown Edred with ſucceſs! Protect my Friends!
Preſerve my Father's life! Preſerve my Country!

Enter VOLNIR *and* CAPTAIN.

VOLNIR.

Hah! Did they thus inſult thee! Brave my power!
And load me with reproaches! They ſhall find
I did not threaten what I'll not perform.
Bear her to inſtant death!—Thy Brother ſcorns
Our generous offer, and hath ſeal'd thy doom.

EDITHA.

O noble Edred!—Learn Barbarian, learn
The ſofter and more cultivated manners
Which thou abhorr'ſt, enervate not the ſoul.
The moſt humane of Brothers and of Men,
The youthful hero warm with patriot zeal,
Could not but thus decide the dangerous conflict;
While honour triumphs o'er fraternal love.

VOLNIR.

Remove her from our ſight.

EDITHA.

EDITHA.

I thank thee Volnir.
I would not linger in uncertainty.
Here thou art kind.—But from my blood expect
No common ſtorm; it rolls with ſpeed toward thee,
And Edred drives it on.

VOLNIR.

Quick, bear her hence.

Enter BRITHRIC.

BRITHRIC.

Oh! ſpare her, and revoke the cruel orders!

VOLNIR.

Say, art thou mad old Man? How haſt thou dared
To enter here unbidden?

BRITHRIC.

I am told
Thou mean'ſt to ſacrifice this captive Maid.

VOLNIR.

She falls a victim to her Brother's obſtinacy,
And her own fooliſh pride.

BRITHRIC.

Oh! if I e'er
Have gain'd attention from thee, hear me now!

Forgive

Forgive the Priſoner; liſten to the Friend,
Who for thy glory feels!—Oft have I wept
This ravaged country, and her ſlaughter'd Sons.
But 'mid the heat of action, in the rage
And fury of the battle, death I know
Muſt take its courſe; nor have I once reproached thee.
Where is the fury of the battle now?
This unreſiſting Maid! muſt ſhe be ſlain,
To ſatisfy a ſplenetic revenge,
Beneath the greatneſs of thy ſoul to think of?
That ſoul, which prompted thee to ſpare my life?
Which thou haſt told me, ſcorn'd to plunge a ſword
In the unguarded boſom of the brave?

VOLNIR.

Thou plead'ſt in vain; uncommon accidents
Call forth unuſual deeds.

BRITHRIC.

Shall accident
Warp then the even tenor of thy temper?
Art thou ſo weak in reſolution?

VOLNIR.

My Priſoner, my Teacher!

BRITHRIC.

I have taught thee,
And thou with gratitude haſt often own'd it,
In civil life, in policy, in war,
Many a glorious, true, and uſeful maxim.

Now let me teach thee an immortal leſſon!
Who, not from paſſion, but from reaſon act;
Cruſh giant arrogance, protect the weak,
And tho' by ſpecious intereſt impell'd,
Dare not with guilt contaminate their ſouls,
May claim a co-equality with Heaven.

VOLNIR.

I need not thy advice; begone, and leave me.

BRITHRIC.

I cannot leave thee.—Didſt thou but behold
This Virgin with my eyes, a thouſand reaſons
Would in thy boſom war againſt her death.
Alas! can beauty influence all but thee?
Beneath that outward elegance of ſhape,
That unaffected dignity, I read
A ſoul, which Volnir cannot but approve.
A ſoul deteſting every meaner act,
Inform'd with innocence, with purity,
Undaunted courage, and ſublimeſt virtue.
Thou fight'ſt againſt her Country—But in her,
Thou wilt inflict a wound on Nature's ſelf.
Manhood will weep, and Denmark's Genius bluſh,
To hear that Volnir could deſcend ſo low,
Becauſe he could not gain a town by treachery,
Coolly to ſpill a captive Virgin's blood.

VOLNIR.

Brithric no more—on thee too may deſcend
The angry ſhaft—beſide thee peril ſtands—
Beware.

GUNHILDA.

GUNHILDA.

Hah! Brithric! (*Whiſpers* Volnir.)

VOLNIR.

He, her Father ſay'ſt thou?

GUNHILDA.

Sigebert his name, the Sire of her and Edred.
Yes, Sigebert is her Father. (*Aloud.*) I caſt off
The veil myſterious.—Fooliſh Maid! behold
Thy open enemy!—Tho' wrath may ſlumber,
It wakes to vengeance. Vengeance brought me hither.
'Twas ſhe that made me a firm Friend to Denmark,
No Captive, but the ſcourge of thee and thine.
The vindicator of my injured fame,
And antient noble ſtock, in me inſulted.

EDITHA.

I look in vain! The lightning doth not blaſt her.

SIGEBERT.

Aſtoniſhment! Can Nature's varying hand
Produce ſuch oppoſites! There the black form
Of treacherous vice—here virtue's brighteſt image.

VOLNIR.

Didſt thou not ſay that Sigebert was his name?

GUNHILDA.

I did.

VOLNIR.

The Earl ſo call'd?

GUNHILDA.

The ſame.

VOLNIR.

Deceiver!
Traitor! Art thou the man, whoſe ſword of yore
So often foil'd the Daniſh ſtrength? Wert thou
Chief of the war, in which my Father periſh'd?
In which the flower of Denmark's youth were ſlain?
Filling our land with widows and orphans?

SIGEBERT.

I was.

VOLNIR.

Now, by yon ſtarry cope I ſwear,
Thou with thy Daughter dieſt!—Th' ill-ſorted league
I here break off, by thy illuſions form'd.
Diſſembling wretch!—When firſt I took the ſpear,
And to revenge my Country, ruſh'd to battle,
I ſwore that thou, of all the Anglian race,
Should'ſt never taſte my mercy.—Heaven is juſt.
The ſtated period is arrived. My oath,
Tho' tardily, ſhall be at length abſolved.

GUNHILDA.

Why was I thus compell'd?—No more—'tis right—
Let miſchief work—my injuries demand it.

At

At leaſt the ſcornful youth will be tormented,
And ſuffer worſe than death in thoſe he loves. (*Aſide.*)
(*Exit.*)

VOLNIR.

Bear them away to ſpeedy execution!

EDITHA.

My Father!

SIGEBERT.

Deareſt, deareſt Editha! (*Embracing.*)

Enter a MESSENGER.

VOLNIR.

What means this haſte?

MESSENGER.

Rodolph, my Lord,—with fierce
And hurried language ſtirs the camp to mutiny.
The ſoldiers throng around him, thy injuſtice
Themes his bold eloquence. They murmur all;
And ſay the Chief hath no diſpenſing power
O'er old eſtabliſh'd cuſtoms: that his priſoner
Is his alone, not thine; her death, or life,
Due to the man who earn'd her with his ſword.

VOLNIR.

Fools as they are! But we will ſatisfy them.
Call to my tent each Leader of the bands,

And

And with them let that fiery youth be preſent,
They all ſhall learn my reaſons. Individuals
Muſt for the general weal their rights forego.
Should they be ardent to ſupport his cauſe,
I need but ſpeak; ſedition will be quell'd.
For theſe, their fate we for awhile defer;
But when the riſing ſun gilds yonder towers,
The foe firſt ſummon'd by the trumpet thither,
And this diſcovery known, ſhall ſee their deaths.
Mean-while divide, and guard them. (*Exit.*)

EDITHA.

Muſt we part?

SIGEBERT.

A little while my Child, to meet for ever.

EDITHA.

I was prepared myſelf.—But, Oh! my Father!
Canſt thou forgive?— (*Kneeling.*)

SIGEBERT.

What means my Editha?

EDITHA.

My folly? my imprudence? to intruſt
That Woman with.——

SIGEBERT.

Oh! riſe!—my bleſſings on thee!
My love! my utmoſt tenderneſs!—Oh! wound not

My

My nature with the thought!—Forgive thee ſay'ſt thou?
And could'ſt thou think that I would wiſh for life
Without my Daughter? I had fondly form'd
A thouſand flattering dreams, of freedom, bliſs,
And future days of joy; but thou in all
Wert ſtill predominant.—Have I forgot
The infant prattler, my prophetic ſoul
E'en then had fix'd to cheer my hours of age?
And can I, now I find, and feel thee all,
Which Fancy in her wildeſt ſcope could frame,
Bear to protract my being, torn from thee?
Could Bertha, could my Edred, e'er have pluck'd
The barbed anguiſh from thy Father's heart?
Oh! 'twould be miſery in its worſt extreme.
'Twas Heaven, kind pitying Heaven, diſcover'd me,
That I might die with thee.

EDITHA.

Oh! this is death;
This, its ſevereſt pang. I feel it here.
It pierces through each inlet of my ſoul;
A Father's tenderneſs, ne'er known till now.
The filial paſſions ſwell, and almoſt burſt
My labouring boſom; gratitude, which ne'er
Can be indulged—whoſe debt muſt be unpaid.
For fate, ſtern fate——

SIGEBERT.

Oh! ceaſe. I know it all.
All thou would'ſt ſay, all thou would'ſt do, I feel.
Each pious duty, every tender care,

Each

Each ſoft ſolicitude.—O worthieſt! beſt!
Have I not known thee? tried thee? art thou not
The Child of my fond heart? more dear to it
Than the warm ſtream which feeds it?

EDITHA.

Thus to meet!
Thus know! thus loſe my Father!

SIGEBERT.

Oh! thou ſhould'ſt not
Have waked me from my viſion to that thought.
To loſe thy Father! to be loſt to him!—
Irrevocably loſt!—And yet, 'tis fit.
For thus diſſolved in tenderneſs, I ſhould not
Meet death, as it becomes the brave to die.

EDITHA.

Meet death!

SIGEBERT.

The common lot of all.

EDITHA.

'Tis true.

SIGEBERT.

To-morrow——

EDITHA.

We muſt ſhare it.

SIGEBERT.

SIGEBERT.

Muſt!—that word!

EDITHA.

The mandate of neceſſity; the call
To virtue, and to fortitude.

SIGEBERT.

I thank thee.
Yes, we will rouſe us from lethargic ſorrow.
The morn ſhall view us with erected mein,
And mark our tearleſs eye.—Theſe Danes ſhall ſee,
And wonder at our brave contempt of death.
But ah! this night!—this dreadful ſeparation!
Into this little night, I could methinks
Have ſtored whole years of happineſs! while thus
I held thee, thus pour'd forth my fond endearments,
And thus received thy tribute of affection.
But 'twill not be—relentleſs ſavages!
(*To the guards who part them.*)
Have ye no mercy?—Oh! a moment longer—
My Editha!

EDITHA.

My Father!

SIGEBERT.

'Tis in vain—
Never ſhall I again embrace my Child.

EDITHA.

My Father!—theſe emotions!—Oh! controul—
Leſt I ſhould ſink—

SIGEBERT.

I will, I will, for thee
I'll force my nature. Sure I ſhould encourage
And comfort thee—not thus by my example
Depreſs—but ah! I cannot—for mortality
Hath forged no bonds to curb parental love,
Farewell!—Farewell!—ye gracious powers ſupport!—

EDITHA.

Heaven will ſupport us. (*Exeunt. Forced off different ways.*)

SCENE II.

RODOLPH's *Tent.*

RODOLPH *and* CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN.

And did they all ſubmit?

RODOLPH.

All, all ſubmitted,
While I was leſt alone to plead my cauſe.
They bleſs'd his prudent care; while I ſeem'd awed,
And ſtifled in my breaſt the fierce reſentment.
But know my Friend, (for ſuch I ſtill have found thee.)

By thee I learn'd his meſſage to the city,
And thus I have at leaſt her doom retarded.
Know then a truſty Band I have engaged,
And bound them to me with a ſolemn oath,
Within this hour to force her guarded tent,
And bear her to my ſhip. Then let our Chief
Lord it o'er paſſive ſlaves, I ſhall enjoy
My loveliest prize, and leave to him unenvied,
The plunder, and the war.

CAPTAIN.

I am thy Friend.
Twice do I owe my life in battle ſaved
To thy victorious arm. Nor will forſake thee,
Tho' hazardous and deſperate be thy plan.

RODOLPH.

Courage and friendſhip can be only tried
In perilous extremes. By Heaven, I ne'er
Knew love till now.—Not all this city's wealth,
Tho' counted ten times o'er, ſhould ever from me
Ranſom this Editha.—Tho' I could wiſh
Her Brother's haughty ſoul to ſuffer pain,
By whom alone I have been foil'd in battle:
Tho' I could wiſh her Father might be puniſh'd,
Who, as I now ſuſpect, as firſt betray'd me:
Yet by her death it ſhall not be. Her abſence
Let them lament. She will rejoice hereafter,
Nor caſt one ſigh toward the Anglian ſhore.

CAPTAIN.

But how haſt thou contrived?

RODOLPH.

I will inſtruct thee.

CAPTAIN.

Hark! *(Shouts, &c. at a diſtance.)*

RODOLPH.

'Twas the ſound of onſet.

CAPTAIN.

It increaſes. *(Shouts, &c.)*

RODOLPH.

The clamour and tumultuous noiſe of battle!

CAPTAIN.

A ſally from the City.——

RODOLPH.

Curſed event!
Muſt I then draw again my ſword for Volnir!
An hour had made me maſter of my wiſhes.
But now perhaps the opportunity
Is loſt, and never may return.
(Shouts, &c.)

CAPTAIN.

The uproar
Spreads wider, and approaches nearer 'twards us.

Enter

Enter a MESSENGER.

RODOLPH.

What are thy tidings?

MESSENGER.

Ruin to the Danes.
Our camp is enter'd; havock and confuſion
Urged by the foe, now triumph o'er our troops.
They ſtole upon us in this ſilent hour,
By ſleep oppreſs'd. Nor yet the dawn appears,
Or glimmering twilight. In their ſhouts reſound
The hated names of Edred and of Albert.
Volnir, with more than mortal courage, holds
Their violence at bay: around his tent
The conflict grows; there he protracts awhile
The Daniſh fate. He bids thee Rodolph haſte,
And head ſome choſen bands by him prepared,
To cover our retreat.

RODOLPH.

I will attend him. (*Exit* Meſſenger.)
Oh! were my gallant Friends but now around me,
I ſtill might bear this much-loved Maid away,
And cut a paſſage thro' th' oppoſing Foe!
But what can we atchieve? Or what remains
But to exert a vain and fruitleſs bravery?
To fight beneath this Chief againſt our wills?
And ſell our lives as dearly as we can? (*Exeunt.*)

ACT V.

SCENE I. *Before the Tent of* EDITHA.

RODOLPH.

'Tis flight, or ſlaughter all.—Theſe fierce Damnonians!
Nought can withſtand their fury.—Yet I could not
Find out the death my arm hath bravely earn'd.
Why did they ope their ranks to let me paſs?
My followers are deſtroy'd—ſhall I alone
Eſcape?—This tent! there's faſcination in it.
The guards are fled—this quarter of the camp
Is ſtill and ſolitary.—Wherefore hither
Wander'd my ſteps unconſcious?—Hold—'tis right—
There's ſomething to be done.—Shall I ſubmit?
Solicit from this haughty Maid protection?
Not love? but life on ſtinted terms!—Ah! no.
'Twere mean—'twere baſe.—Shall I, a priſoner,
Behold her in poſſeſſion of another?
Some enemy beloved, preferr'd to me?
No never—kill her then—and ſo prevent it.
But hark! I hear methinks the ſound of ſteps.
Darkneſs as yet holds back the ſtruggling morn.
Quick let me be.—She dies.—Prepare thee Editha!
Keen is my ſword—and deſperate is my mind.
I'll enter—did ſhe ſpeak? No, all is ſilent.
I will not give her time to ſupplicate,
Leſt ſhe diſarm my reſolution. (*Enters the Tent.*)

Enter

Enter SIGEBERT.

SIGEBERT.

Freed by their flight, to whom I was intruſted,
I come to thee my Editha! and wield
A ſword again on Britiſh ſoil, to guard
Thy tent my Daughter, from the lawleſs rage
Of Friend or Foe; for beauty ſuch as thine
May fear them both alike.—My Child! my Editha!

Enter RODOLPH *from the Tent.*

RODOLPH.

Who calls on Editha?

SIGEBERT.

Who? Whence art thou?
Why that ſtern queſtion? wherefore in this tent?

RODOLPH.

Ceaſe thy enquiries, leſt my anſwer pleaſe not.

SIGEBERT.

Rodolph!

RODOLPH.

Betrayer! Yes.

SIGEBERT.

Betrayer!

RODOLPH.

RODOLPH.

Caitiff!
False Friend! and thence, the murderer of thy Daughter.

SIGEBERT.

My Daughter!—Oh! my soul!

RODOLPH.

This hand hath slain her.

SIGEBERT.

Thou could'st not—dared'st not.

RODOLPH.

Didst thou think a Briton
Should ever win the Maid beloved by Rodolph?

SIGEBERT.

Monster!—And canst thou to a Father's ear?—
Thou hast not slain her.

RODOLPH.

By yon Heaven she's dead.
This reeking steel permits me not to lye.

SIGEBERT.

My curses on thee, thou inhuman murderer!
O tardy feet! thus am I come to guard thee
My Editha? And have I lost thee thus?—

Thou

Thou ſacrilegious wretch! didſt thou not fear
From that pure temple—But I can revenge
My Child! I can revenge, if not protect thee.
Thus ruffian, I aſſail thee—guard thyſelf.

RODOLPH.

Away old Man! and dread the arm of youth.
I covet not thy death.

SIGEBERT.

Thy arm of youth
This old Man braves, nay ſcorns. Old as I am,
I have not yet forgot to bear a ſword.
I am the avenger of my Daughter's death,
And thou the deſtined victim.

RODOLPH.

Hence! Away!
'Tis thine to weep, not fight.

SIGEBERT.

And weep I will.
But firſt the crimſon ſtream ſhall flow from thee.
When thou wert in thy cradle, I have trod
The fields of war; thy gaſping countrymen
Then own'd my proweſs; many a Daniſh Chief
Hath ſunk in duſt beneath me. In my heart
I feel the ardour of my youth revive.
My Daughter's fate braces each feeble nerve.
For her, for her I ſtrike.

RODOLPH.

No more. Begone!

SIGEBERT.

Thou ſhalt not paſs.

RODOLPH.

Thou urgeſt on thy fate.
Why wilt thou force deſtruction on thy head?

SIGEBERT.

Inſulting wretch! Aſſaſſinating coward!
Come, to the Daughter's, add the Father's death!
Nor doth he wiſh to live, deprived of her.
Yet neither doth he fear thy ſtrength of youth,
Nor doubt of conqueſt in ſo juſt a cauſe.

RODOLPH.

Take then thy death!

(*Fight.* Rodolph *falls, mortally wounded.*)

SIGEBERT.

Death is not thine to give;
'Tis Heaven's alone.—O barbarous Dane! the debt
To vengeance thou haſt paid.—Yet, what's thy life
For her's, in lieu of Editha's?—Alas!
How can I enter here?—Support my ſteps
Ye trembling knees!—moſt miſerable Father!—
Dead! dead!—deteſted place!—the deepeſt dungeon,
The habitation of the toad and adder,

Were

Were paradiſe to this polluted tent,
Where virtue, honour, lye inſteep'd in blood.
Yet will I on—tho' horror ſhould o'erwhelm me.
(*Enters the Tent.*)

Enter EDRED.

EDRED.

Through the forſaken camp, in vain I ſeek
Thee, hapleſs Maid!—Alas! this victory
Is but half won, if Editha be loſt. (Rodolph *groans.*)
Hah! Who art thou? this twilight gloom forbids
To trace thy features.

RODOLPH.

Rodolph is my name——
Sure I have heard that voice.

EDRED.

The voice of Edred.
Brave, but ill-fortuned foe! I pity thee.
Thy wounds ſhall be with utmoſt care attended.
We o'er the fallen, triumph not.

RODOLPH.

In death
I thank thee Youth. Twice hath thy ſword prevail'd
O'er me in battle. But thy ſofter manners
Now conquer my fierce nature.—All thy care
Were fruitleſs now—e'en if thou could'ſt forgive me.

EDRED.

Forgive thee!

RODOLPH.

I thy Sister loved—her fate
Thou know'ſt not—ſhe—in yonder tent—
Lies ſlain—the murderer is— (*Dies.*)

EDRED.

In yonder tent!—The murderer is—Where?
Where is the murderer?—Invidious death!
To ſtop thee there!—Slain!—Deareſt, deareſt Editha!
This did I dread.—O cruel, cruel Volnir!
Thou wert the murderer.—Yet pale and cold
Let me embrace thee! claſp thee to my heart!
A Brother's agonizing heart!—Oh! ſlain
In early youth!—Yet fame is thine my Siſter.
Rather than prompt me to betray my country,
Thou greatly dieđſt.—So would I wiſh to fall.
(*Advancing to the Tent.*)
Amazement! horror! Do my eyes play falſe?
Mock'd by this faint and dubious light?—No, ruffian,
Thou ſhalt not 'ſcape me.—That's no doubt the murderer!
I ſee him dimly ſtanding, and his ſword
Still in his hand, he holds.—He bends to earth.
And dareſt thou touch her ſacred corſe barbarian!
Out ſword!—perform thy office!—But thou ſhalt not
Die in this hallow'd tent—I'll drag thee thence.
(*Enters, and drags out* Sigebert, *who drops his ſword.*)

SIGEBERT.

SIGEBERT.

Strike! ſtrike!—I'll bleſs the hand which gives the blow.

EDRED.

Moſt baſe! moſt execrable deed! if crimes
Beyond the common courſe of villainy
Deſerve a puniſhment more fell, this act
Claims ſomething more than death.

SIGEBERT.

It claims damnation.
Heaven will not, cannot pardon it.

EDRED.

Nor I
The inſtrument of Heaven's avenging wrath.
Prepare thee for thy death!—Thou murderous ſlave!
Sure as the Sun begins to ſtreak the Eaſt
With purple light, this moment is thy laſt.

(*Liſting his hand.*)

SIGEBERT.

O Youth!—this warmth of thine! reſtrain thy hand—
Art thou not—

EDRED.

Peace, I will not hear thee; old
And hoary in iniquity!—now—

(*Going to ſtrike.*)

SIGEBERT.

SIGEBERT.

Hold!
I am—

EDRED.

I care not who thou art—my ſword— (*Going to ſtrike.*)

Enter EDITHA.

EDITHA.

Thy Father! Spare thy Father!

EDRED.

Gracious Powers!

SIGEBERT.

And is it poſſible!—What bleſt event!——
Art thou alive! reſtored to me again!
All-bounteous Heaven! This miracle of mercy!
My Editha alive! unwounded! ſafe!
'Tis joy too great for frail humanity—
My labouring brain turns giddy with the rapture—
The heart of age faint under theſe emotions.
Thy arm—thy arm my Son—ſoft—ſtay awhile—
Oh! leave me not my Child—I ſhall recover—
And bear with calmneſs—Hold—I'm well again:
My ſtrength and former faculties return.

EDRED.

My Father!—Oh! it muſt be ſo.—And have I
Lifted my hand againſt thee?

SIGEBERT.

SIGEBERT.

Noble Youth!
Son of my much-loved Bertha! I have heard
Thy glorious actions. Editha hath told me.
Preſerver of thy Mother's ſacred life!
Of mine, and of thy Siſter's! More than this,
The ſaviour of thy Country!

EDRED.

I behold
That face with reverence, and theſe words of thine
Pierce thro' my inmoſt boſom, and enkindle
Tranſports ne'er felt till now.—But how ſo long
Wert thou conceal'd? How in this hoſtile camp?
Why in this Daniſh dreſs?

SIGEBERT.

The tale is long;
I'll tell thee all anon.—But how my Daughter
Haſt thou eſcaped? In diſappointed rage,
The barbarous Rodolph ſaid that he had ſlain thee.
For which he fell by my avenging ſword.
In all the agony of frantic grief,
Entering thy tent, I thought I found thee there,
Yet warm—tho' breathleſs; in deſpair I claſp'd
The bleeding corſe; and by the duſk deceived,
Mourn'd over it for thine.

EDRED.

Me too the Dane
Inform'd that thou wert dead within thy tent;

And

And almoſt ſtain'd my hand with parricide.
But Providence ſent thee to ſave my ſoul
From horror and remorſe.—Say, how my Siſter
Didſt thou eſcape? And who is ſlain for thee?

EDITHA.

Gunhilda was no doubt the fated victim.

EDRED.

Gunhilda!

EDITHA.

Oſwy's Daughter.

EDRED.

Treacherous Maid!
I know her Father's baſeneſs and her own.
The intercepted guides who led her hither,
Diſcover'd all.

EDITHA.

One tent confined us both.
I thought her too a captive; and with pity
Return'd her ſeeming pity. She reveal'd
My rank to Volnir; thence his threatening meſſage.
My ſimple confidence betray'd my Father;
By which, when bravely thou defiedſt his power,
We both had well-nigh fall'n a ſacrifice.

SIGEBERT.

Hadſt thou not ſtorm'd their trenches, we e'er now
Had with the dead been number'd.

EDITHA.

When I found
That thy assault was prosperous, and the foe
Fled headlong from our gallant countrymen,
I from my tent rush'd forth, if possible
To find my Father. Trembling, in the entrance
Gunhilda stood, fearful to stay, or fly.

EDRED.

And there no doubt my Sister fell for thee,
By Rodolph's blind and erring fury slain.

EDITHA.

Through the deserted camp in vain I wander'd,
I found not whom I sought, till by the hand
Of Heaven directed, dubious of my way,
I measured back again the mazy path,
And found him here.

SIGEBERT.

Found me indeed; and never
To part from thee again, till Nature's hand
Stops my faint pulse, and sinks me to my grave.

EDRED.

Oh! be that time far off!—I long to hear
Thy sad disasters, every strange adventure,
And wonderful vicissitude of fate.
Much must thou have endured.

SIGEBERT.

For eighteen years
Hath Volnir held me an unwilling priſoner.—
But now thou ſhalt conduct me to thy Mother,
Much do I wiſh to ſee that beſt of Women.
There ſhalt thou queſtion me, and I will anſwer
Throughout the live-long day. Nor wilt thou hear
An uninſtructive leſſon. My experience
Hath dearly been acquired, thro' many a ſcene
Of checquer'd life, by varying fortune caſt.
But now each boiſtrous ſtorm is over-blown,
And I ſhall ſpend my life's decline in peace,
Sequeſter'd from the world.

EDRED.

That muſt not be.
I here reſign to thee my borrow'd ſtate.
Thy King, thy Country, claim thy ſage advice.
Nor art thou yet by years ſo much enfeebled,
But they may claim thy valour.

SIGEBERT.

Oh! my Son!
Thy duty charms me. I ſhall not be needed;
For thou art all their own!—The tears of joy
Moiſten my cheeks my Children, while I think
Upon your virtues.—Happy, happy Sigebert!
In the warm hours of youth I could not ſee
Such true, ſuch home-felt ſatisfaction.
O'erpaſt misfortune, e'en to luxury

Heightens my joy. Now do I know indeed
What 'tis to be a Father—exquiſite
Is the delight from Children ſuch as mine.

EDITHA.

Benignant Heaven!—Ye fierce, ye boaſted Heroes!
Ye Conquerors of the world! here look with envy.
We taſte, we feel what you in vain deſire,
What war and ravaged countries cannot yield,
True, real happineſs. (*Trumpet.*)

SIGEBERT.

What ſounds are theſe?

EDRED.

'Tis Albert, from the ſlaughter of the Danes
Returning. (*Enter* Albert.) Oh! my Friend! let me
[embrace thee.
My Editha is ſafe—And I have found
A Father here. This is the noble Earl
Whom well thou know'ſt by fame: This is my Father,
Him too from hapleſs ſlavery have we reſcued.

SIGEBERT.

The brave and virtuous empty forms deſpiſe:
They mingle in an inſtant ſouls together.
Brave Albert! Second Son! whoſe patriot virtues
(*Embracing*)
Fill my old heart with warm affection 'tward thee,
Thus let me ſtrain thee to my breaſt!

ALBERT.

How ſweet
Are the applauſes of the wiſe and good!
My heart acknowledges the warmth of thine,
And every ſtring accordant vibrates here.—
O Editha! Thou little think'ſt what pleaſure
I feel in thy deliverance: not more
Thy Brother, or thy Father feels.

EDITHA.

The thanks
A grateful ſoul can give, receive. The worth
Of Albert I revere; thy Country ſaved
Shall join its praiſe with mine.

EDRED.

How far my Friend
Was thy purſuit?

ALBERT.

To yonder heights they fled.
There were they rallied by their Chief again,
Who bravely fought. All that a Leader could,
To turn the deſperate fortune of the day,
He did. At length, when all was loſt, he join'd
His flying bands, who now in wild diſmay
Haſte to their ſhips; our victory's compleat.
But ſay my Friend, the treacherous Gunhilda,
Haſt thou not found her in the Camp?

SIGEBERT.

She lies
Dead in this tent, ſlain by miſtake for her.

ALBERT.

For Editha! Juſt Heaven!

SIGEBERT.

Now let us hence!
This accident ſhall be to thee explain'd.
To all my hiſtory ſhall be unfolded,
Each wonderful event.

ALBERT.

But firſt 'twere fit,
E'er we diſmiſs our troops, to ſeize and puniſh
The traitor Oſwy.

SIGEBERT.

Would'ſt thou puniſh him?

EDRED.

Doth he not merit puniſhment?

SIGEBERT.

He doth.
And can he feel a greater, than to view
His murder'd Child? Could cunning cruelty
Deviſe one more ſevere?—Oh! Editha!
The tortures of the rack were light to this:
Well know I what a Father muſt endure.
To think too that ſhe fell by his contrivance!
No, gallant Albert, ſeek no other vengeance.
Permit him to retreat, oppreſs'd with ſorrow,

And ſtung with conſcious guilt. While we reflect
With pleaſure on the difference of our ſouls,
Which bear no ſordid ſtains. While we rejoice,
Raiſed from calamity and woe, to bliſs.
While we congratulate our ranſom'd Country,
And as we offer up our thanks to Heaven,
Pray, that ſhe ever thus may ſtand ſecure
From foreign arms, and from domeſtic treaſon.
Free, glorious, happy, to remoteſt ages.

4 AP 54

FINIS.

EPILOGUE.

EPILOGUE.

NO longer now in pomp of grief array'd,
No longer Editha, the Captive Maid;
Prepared t' examine this ſame Tragic ſtory,
In my own perſon I advance before ye.
My critic art at leaſt this once to try,
And ſcan our Bard's defects with niceſt eye.
Yet ſome apology th' attempt may need—
But by your looks embolden'd, I'll proceed.
Who, without terror, Rodolph's fury traces?
Why, tho' a Dane, was he refuſed the Graces?
Were ſuch the manners of thoſe Northern Climes?
Why not have bent them to our gentler times?
To ſeek his Miſtreſs' life!—So deſperate grown!—
He ſhould have rather fled, and ſaved his own.
Surely *that* Albert might have ſpoke more plain.
The City's Præfect—but my dying Swain.
Why had he not ſome crafty ſcheme deviſed?
And ventured 'mid the Daniſh camp diſguiſed?
He ſhould have crept, or ſwam, or fought, or ſtrove,
And hazarded his truſt—to gain his Love.
Th' affection of a Brother!—How miſplaced!
And what a violence to modern Taſte!
A ſoul defying death! and accents Roman!
How could *they* ſuit with any Britiſh Woman!
The ſimple, and the natural!—How ſtupid!
I ſhould have ranſack'd all the ſtores of Cupid.
Hopes, fears, doubts, jealouſies, and warm deſires,
Darts, arrows, daggers, poiſon'd bowls, and fires.
Are to a Tragic Piece my powers decreed?
Let it be great and Tragical indeed.
Let Paſſion ceaſe the guiding rein t' obey,
Let Grief be ſtrain'd to its ſublimeſt key,
In frantic fury let me curſe the light,
And die enchantingly, with all my might.
But egotiſms and irony apart——
Say, have our Author's numbers touch'd the heart?
Have they from Pity ſtole th' ingenuous ſigh?
And raiſed the trembling tear in Virtue's eye?
This is th' unerring comment; this the teſt—
And all remarks beſides—like mine—a jeſt.